

Nichol's Series of Commentaries.

PETER MUFFET ON PROVERBS;

JOHN COTTON ON ECCLESIASTES,

AND ON THE CANTICLES; OR, SONG OF SOLOMON.

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A COMMENTARY
ON THE
WHOLE BOOK OF PROVERBS.

BY
PETER MUFFET.

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TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE LORD,

THE LORD EDWARD, EARL OF BEDFORD,

GRACE AND PEACE BE MULTIPLIED.

THE former edition of my Commentary upon the Proverbs of Solomon, Right Honourable Earl, was not only by your honour favourably received, but by divers godly Christians right well accepted. Nevertheless, it seemed unto some of my friends to be somewhat too brief. The former impression being sold, they desired me to think upon a second edition, and therein to handle matters somewhat more amply. Wherefore, according to their desire, although mine encumbrances and infirmities have been of late exceeding many and great, yet have I the second time travailed with my work again, and now published a larger and fuller exposition than that was which went before; yea, and added a table and another short treatise to the former. If yet either in regard of largeness or plainness of writing (which I see to be a thing necessary, and which I more respect than before I have done) I shall scant satisfy all, I would pray them to impute it to my

want of leisure, the true and only hindrance thereof. If there be escapes in the words or in the points and distinctions of any sentences, this could not by me be remedied, by reason of mine absence from the press. If any hereafter of those who best can do it shall set forth some perfect exposition upon the holy Proverbs, (which to do is a work of infinite labour,) it shall be the gain of the church, and the thing that I desire. In the mean season, Most Honourable Earl, I dedicate once again this my Commentary unto your Honour, desiring you with wonted favour to receive it, and to bend your eyes to look into it. Hoping that you will so do, and wishing all prosperity, as unto yourself, so to all of your most noble stock, whereunto I am deeply bound; I reverently commend your honour to Almighty God.

Your Honour's at commandment,

P. M.

A COMMENTARY

UPON THE

BOOK OF THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON.

CHAPTER. I.

VER. 1. *The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel.*

Two things are contained in this first verse: the one, the matter of this whole book, in this word *proverbs*; the other, the author thereof, in these titles *of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel*. Proverbs are certain general, short, and pithy sayings, used, or to be used, in every man's mouth. Albeit sundry parables are set down in the writings of the prophets, the evangelists, and the apostles; yet this book only of the Scripture is entitled by the name of Proverbs, because in it alone proverbial sentences are continued without ceasing or intermission, and without mingling of stories or prayers, or other matters therewithal. For in this little volume a great heap of grave and most prudent sayings is so nearly couched and so briefly comprised, as that proverbs, like drifts of snow, seem to lie thick together, and, like grapes of the same bunch, to cluster one upon another. As concerning the methods of this book, neither are the proverbs thereof so confusedly shuffled, but that some of them, now and then, have affinity and coherence together; nor yet so suitably sorted, but that even those oftentimes which are placed as neighbours very nearly, differ far in matter asunder, and have no dependence

upon one another. But, letting pass the order of these divine parables, we are rather to consider the author or utterer thereof, who is affirmed to have been Solomon. Solomon, in the Hebrew language, doth signify peaceable, which name even the Lord himself did give unto the author of this book, 1 Chron. xxii. 9, because in his days, after long wars, he purposed to grant such peace unto the Israelites as that they might safely and securely sit under their vines and under their fig-trees. Now as the very name of Solomon, which signifieth peace, is sweet, so his stock was honourable, seeing he was a flourishing branch or bud, as it were, of David, whose son he is affirmed to have been. It is the manner of the Hebrew writers, when they mention any person, for distinction's sake to set down not only his own proper name, but his father's. But whereas Solomon here is called David's son, it seemeth to me that his father's name is expressed, not only for distinction, but for honour's sake. Nevertheless, whereas David had divers children, this title of being his son was no such special or singular prerogative, but that it did agree in common as well to Absalom, or Adonijah, or the other sons of David, as to Solomon. Wherefore, to the end that Solomon might be known from all other by the garland upon his head, and declared to be more honourable than his brethren by his sceptre in his hand, he is shewed

to have been king of Israel—of Israel I say, the chosen people of God, among whom only in those days was the visible church.

Ver. 2. *To know wisdom and instruction, and to understand the words of prudence.*

In this second verse two ends or uses of the parables of this book are noted unto us. The former end is the knowing of wisdom and instruction. Wisdom is an effectual knowledge of things which are to be believed or practised, wrought by the light of God's word and Spirit clearing and directing the mind and understanding. As concerning instruction, it is a virtue consisting in the right using of wisdom, whereby, through the Lord's working and schooling, the heart and life of men is reformed. The second use of these parables is to understand the words of prudence, (or skilful speeches.) These words of prudence are those holy doctrines or divine instructions whereby a man may reform that which is amiss in him, and govern himself aright in the whole course of his life. For wherewithal shall a young man, yea, any man, redress his way, but by ruling himself after the word of God, every sentence whereof is, as it were, a straight line leading to repentance, but especially the sentences of this excellent book?

Ver. 3. *To receive the instruction of understanding, of justice, of judgment, and of all equity, (or righteousness.)*

Herein divers parcels of instruction, mentioned in the former verse, are specified. First, These parables serve unto the renewing and lightening of the mind, which here is meant by understanding. Secondly, They teach justice, whereby is given to every one that which is his due. Thirdly, They teach also judgment, whereby the straight rule of God's word and his exact law is in every point and action observed. Finally, They teach all equity, whereby 'whatsoever things are true, whatsoever comely, whatsoever just, whatsoever holy, whatsoever acceptable, whatsoever of good report, of any praise or any virtue, are thought on, practised, and followed after,' Phil. iv. 8.

Ver. 4. *To give unto the simple sharpness of wit, (or wariness,) and to the child knowledge and discretion, (or wittiness.)*

That wisdom which was spoken of him in the second verse, is now in this divided into certain

branches, as, namely, into sharpness of wit, knowledge, and discretion. The simple, by whom they are understood who are rude and heedless in their dealing, shall by the parables of this book attain unto sharpness of wit or wariness,—that is to say, not only a quick conceit, or good capacity, but a forecast in foreseeing of dangers, and preventing of harms. For these proverbs have the nature and effect of the whole word of God, whereof they are a part, which, as the prophet David affirmeth, giveth wisdom unto the simple. Again, that child, or childish person, who wanteth experience or staidness, or who is a novice, as it were, in understanding, shall by learning the divine sentences written in this book, not only come unto knowledge, or a perceiving of truth and error, but unto discretion, or soundness in judgment, and staidness in affection. For as the fountain of the whole word of God maketh those that are exercised therein, Ps. cxix. 99, more learned than their teachers, and more prudent than their elders; so these sacred proverbs, as rivers flowing therefrom, have the same sovereign virtue, and work the self-same wholesome effect.

Ver. 5. *A wise man shall hear, and increase in learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels.*

Herein is further declared that the sentences of this book will be profitable, not only to the unlearned, but to the learned. The wise man, or he who already hath some good knowledge in spiritual and holy things, shall by the help of these parables see into divine mysteries more fully than ever he did. Again, a man of understanding, or a profound clerk, who is singularly well seen in the Scriptures, shall by these proverbs be more furnished than ever he was with skill and cunning.

Ver. 6. *To teach (or to understand) a parable and an eloquent speech; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings.*

Solomon now declareth herein what he meaneth by the words of prudence mentioned in the second verse of this chapter, for they are by him divided into four kinds: first, A parable, or a common proverb; secondly, An eloquent speech, or a fine description of a matter; thirdly, The words of the wise, or choice terms full of art and learning; last

of all, Their dark sayings, or hard and obscure riddles, which shadow or cover some secret meaning. The prophet Habakkuk, chap. ii. 6, describing in his prophecy the unsatiable covetousness of the Babylonians, who had preyed upon all the nations of the world, doth threaten those greedy cormorants, that the people whom they had devoured should take up against them a parable, an eloquent speech, and dark sayings; by which place of Scripture it appeareth that three of these words do differ one from the other, albeit not simply, yet at the least in some respect. Now besides these three sorts of choice and picked sentences, this our author in the book of the preacher, Eccles. xii. 11, maketh mention of the words of the wise, which he affirmeth to be as goads, and as nails that are fastened. Whereby it is further manifest, that even those four terms, to wit, a parable, an eloquent speech, the words of the wise and their dark sayings, are to be distinguished the one from the other. But howsoever it is, (not to stand too curiously on the scanning of the difference of words,) it is evident that the fruit of this book will be exceeding great, seeing the diligent reader or hearer thereof shall thereby be enabled to pierce into the meaning of most excellent instructions, which are able to build up a man in faith and obedience.

Ver. 7. *The fear of God is the beginning of knowledge: (but) wisdom and instruction fools despise.*

Solomon having declared the use of this book, sheweth now the sum or chief point of the matter therein contained, and laboureth to stir up every one to hearken diligently to the particular precepts thereof. The word of God, which teacheth and engendereth a reverent awe of the Lord, is here (as elsewhere in the Scripture, Ps. xix. 9) called the fear of God. It is said to be the beginning of knowledge, because no art or doctrine, saving this only, can bring a man to eternal life. For this cause Moses speaketh thus to the children of Israel in the book of Deuteronomy, chap. iv. 6, 'You shall keep and do these statutes; for this is your wisdom and your prudence, before the eyes of the people, who hearing all these statutes will say, only this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' Nevertheless, howsoever indeed the doctrine of God's word is the flower of all knowledge which is in the

world: 'yet (as is added in the latter part of this verse) wisdom and instruction fools despise;' for they neglect and refuse wise counsel given them concerning the choosing of that which is good, and reject all warning whereby they are admonished to shun that which is evil.

Ver. 8. *My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake thou not the doctrine of thy mother.*

Ver. 9. *For they shall be a comely ornament unto thine head, and a chain unto thy neck.*

After that Solomon hath declared what is the chief point of knowledge, he cometh now to exhort children to obey and regard the admonitions of their parents, whereby they may most readily attain unto true wisdom. He most lovingly calleth every one to whom he speaketh his son, to shew that with a fatherly affection he desireth and seeketh the salvation of all. Furthermore, saith he, hear the instruction of thy father; as if he should have said, Inasmuch as instruction is the means whereby wisdom is attained, for none is born wise, children are before all things to hearken unto counsel, but especially to the advice of their parents, as those who most naturally tender, and most heartily wish, their welfare and well-doing. But it is the part of children, not only to hearken to the advice of their fathers and mothers, but not to forsake the same, either for the seducing of sinners, or for any other cause whatsoever. For if that which is planted by the father or mother be rooted out by Satan or his instruments, or if that which is received by hearing is not retained in a good conscience, or a constant heart, unto the end, all is to no purpose. Now, to the end that children may be brought to regard and keep their parents' admonitions, Solomon in the next verse declareth the fruit which they shall reap by their obedience. 'For,' saith he, 'they shall be a comely ornament unto thine head, and a chain unto thy neck'—that is to say, as jewels and gay apparel greatly adorn and set out those that therewith are arrayed and decked, so thy parents' instructions, by thee obeyed, shall grace and beautify thine heart and life in such sort as that thou shalt seem amiable both unto God and man. For by the outward ornaments of comely attire, and of a chain, long life, a good name, honour, wealth, the favour of good men, and of God himself, yea, eternal glory

and happiness, are shadowed out, whereunto obedient children attain, partly in this world, partly in the world to come.

Ver. 10. *My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not.*

As parents are to be heard, so seducers are to be avoided, by whom great danger ariseth, especially to those that are young, who are not only void of experience, but naturally prone unto evil; for such as go about to seduce are wont to draw youth from those good things which they have been taught at home. Wherefore, after that children have been exhorted in the former verses to honour their parents, they are now very fitly dissuaded from following of evil company and wicked counsel. Indeed all men are transgressors of the laws of almighty God; but by the name of sinners in this place, notorious offenders, as, for example, thieves and robbers, are understood. If then, saith the wise king, either any in general, that are set on mischief, or such in particular, as use to lie in wait for a purse by the highways, entice or allure thee by flattering speeches or fair promises, consent thou not; yield not to their temptations, but resist them. There is no admonition more needful for youth than this, yea, it is very necessary even for those children who are best disposed, unto whom oftentimes it falleth out that albeit they have been well brought up by their parents from the cradle, or are well inclined of their own natural disposition, yet, if at any time they light into the company or acquaintance of lewd persons, they are led aside to do that which is evil, and to commit all manner of wickedness. Many a good man's son hath been cast away at this rock, for the which cause it is the more carefully to be shunned, especially when the Spirit of God, by the pen of the wisest instructor that ever wrote, giveth warning thereof.

Ver. 11. *If they shall say, Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood, let us freely hide ourselves against the innocent:*

Ver. 12. *We shall swallow them up alive as the grave; and whole, as they that go down into the pit:*

Ver. 13. *We shall find all precious substance, (and) fill our houses with spoils.*

Ver. 14. *Thou shalt cast thy lot amongst us; there shall be one purse amongst us all.*

Ver. 15. *My son, walk not in the same way with them; draw back thy foot from their path.*

Solomon, in the person of a careful father, counselleth the young man herein to take heed of being seduced by the enticing speeches and allurements of those who make no conscience to steal or rob by the highway. To this end he first bringeth in these thieves or robbers, making, as it were, an oration to the simple young man; secondly, In the last of these verses, he exhorteth him, though he hear their words, not to follow their deeds, not to enter into their company: 'If they shall say, Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood, let us freely hide ourselves against the innocent: we shall swallow them up alive as the grave, and whole, as they that go down into the pit,' &c. In these verses the robbers, presenting the objection of danger which the young man might make, declare unto him the course which they mean to take in spoiling travellers of their goods and lives. They tell him, first of all, that they will not openly murder the passenger, but lurk in some bush or corner for such an intent, so that, carrying the matter closely, they shall never be called into question. Thus, by breeding in him hope of lying hid or escaping punishment, they go about to draw him into their league, and to make him one of their devilish fraternity. Secondly, They shew how sure they are to meet with the prey, affirming that inasmuch as they are many and mighty, they will undoubtedly take the passengers and hold them fast enough for making hue and cry after them; for they compare themselves to the grave and pit, which consume and enclose those persons or things which are put or fall thereinto. Wherefore the thieves very arrogantly boast that they will bind and spoil those that travel by the highway, swallowing them, though they be not dead but alive, and devouring them, albeit they neither are wounded nor lame, but sound of their limbs: 'We shall get all precious substance; we shall fill our houses with spoils: thou shalt cast thy lot amongst us; there shall be one purse amongst us all,' &c. In these speeches profit is propounded as a lure to draw the young man to theft and murder. The sense of the former of these two verses is, that by the course before spoken of, a rich booty, and great store of money, of jewels, and suchlike treasures, may be attained, and shall cer-